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ABSTRACT

A study sought to determine factors and conditions which distinguish effective and less effective staff inservice training. Over 1000 teachers and administrators, who participated in 112 staff inservice projects, were the study subjects. Data was gathered by pre- and post-workshop questionnaires. This report presents a summary of the findings on: (1) teachers' inservice needs; (2) characteristics of effective workshops; (3) effective and negative methods of workshop presentation; (4) characteristics related to positive ratings of staff inservice training (duration, size, representation, and school level); (5) administrative characteristics associated with effective inservice; and (6) the school and community as a context for professional development. In the summary, it is pointed out that the findings indicate that many factors influence the development of effective staff inservice training. Factors noted to be particularly important include the quality of the workshop, quality and extent of administrative involvement, and the school and community as a context for professional development. (JD)

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Characteristics of Successful
Staff Inservice Training

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Introduction

This article reports on a study of effective practices in staff inservice training, conducted by TDR Associates, Inc. of Newton, Massachusetts under a cooperative agreement with the Commonwealth Inservice Institute of the Massachusetts Department of Education. The study, funded by the National Institute of Education, was conducted during 1981-83. It was a basic research study, not an evaluation of the Institute or its funded programs, personnel, or policy. The Commonwealth Inservice Institute provided TDR with access to the various study sites in exchange for the study's findings and recommendations as they emerged.

The subjects of the study were over 1000 teachers and administrators who participated in one of 112 staff inservice projects funded by the Commonwealth Inservice Institute between 1980 and 1982. The purpose of the study was to determine factors and conditions which distinguish effective and less effective staff inservice training. Effective inservice is defined here as on-site training which has a positive impact on teaching and learning in schools.

Staff Inservice in Massachusetts and the Commonwealth Inservice Institute

Staff inservice training has always been considered an important strategy for education improvement. It can be site-specific, and can be either individually or organizationally focused. It can provide school districts with a mechanism which will enhance their educational programs, improve curricula and staff, and aid in achieving their organizational goals and objectives.

Trends in education in Massachusetts and nationwide have made the need for effective staff development especially critical. Recent changes in Massachusetts have required schools to respond to increasing demands for improved instruction in basic skills, more accountability, and new technologies. Ironically, these increased demands are unfolding as school systems must deal with staff reductions, reduced budgets, program shifts, and professional staffs who are older and occasionally teaching in areas of secondary certification or proficiency. The impending shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in the Math and Science areas, may only serve to exacerbate this problem and require that teachers acquire new competencies and updated skills.

The TDR Study: A Summary of Findings

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phases of the study (1980 - 1982), 685 teachers received an 18-page questionnaire survey which examined various aspects of the inservice program, participant's background and school characteristics. In addition, 74 of the participants were interviewed from selected sites and structured case studies were prepared on 14 separate projects. The results of this phase of the study were presented to the Board in August, 1982.

Phase II of the Study (1982 - 1983) involved over 400 teachers and administrators who participated in one of 36 Institute-funded workshops during the spring of 1982. Participants received three questionnaire surveys;

- . A 17-page questionnaire before the inservice workshop began;
- . A 15-page questionnaire at the conclusion of the inservice;
and
- . A 2-page follow-up questionnaire six months after the inservice training ended.

Additionally, 40 teachers and administrators were interviewed in follow-up visits to 8 of the 36 inservice sites. The purpose of this extensive data collection was to determine:

- . Teachers' inservice needs and expectations.
- . The characteristics of the Inservice workshops.
- . How teachers acquired new information, skills and behaviors.
- . What skills, information, etc., teachers tend to use, and why.
- . The long-term effects of the inservice training.
- . Factors that promoted or prevented teachers continued use of new skills, information, etc.

As with Phase I, information was also collected on participants' background, professional experiences, and school characteristics.

A profile of the participants in the second phase of the study indicates:

- . 76% are female.
- . The average age is 40.
- . 51% have a Master's Degree or higher.
- . Professional experience: 14 years in education; 11 in their present district; 9 in their present school.
- . 94% are teachers.
- . 74% are classroom teachers.

- . 50% are elementary school teachers.
- . 64% are highly satisfied with their jobs.
- . 43% reside in the town in which they teach.

An analysis of responses collected from these participants indicate the following:

About teachers' needs

- . Teachers tend to be practical learners.
- . They report high needs to:
 - . Achieve (be successful) with students.
 - . Be appreciated (recognized as successful) by superiors.
- . They need information on:
 - . New or varied teaching methods.
 - . Motivating students to learn/achieve.
 - . Their own teaching style or behavior.
- . They prefer to learn:
 - . Through hands-on activities; and
 - . Putting information into practice in their classes.

About Inservice Workshops: As with Phase I of this study, Phase II data indicates that the quality and characteristic of the workshop itself are significantly related to participants' ratings of effective inservice, particularly in the following areas:

--Methods of Recruitment:

- . When the respondent attended voluntarily, out of interest, associations were positive; on the other hand,

- . When the respondent "was ordered to attend" the association was significantly negative.

--Methods of Presentation--educators prefer to learn about practical skills and information, and that they prefer instructional methods that are interesting and varied. Specific instructional techniques which were rated as more effective for inservice programs were:

- . The use of small group discussion;
- . Practice implementation of skills learned at session;
- . Observing other participants or consultants in practice; and
- . Practicing new techniques in the work setting while the training is still ongoing.

On the other hand, the following methods have a negative effect:

- . Lecturing by an instructor or consultant; and
- . The use of information packages (packets) as the main vehicle for presenting workshop content.

--Organizational Characteristics of the workshops--the following characteristics are related to positive ratings of staff inservice training:

- . Duration - in general, the optimal range for most workshops is between 12 and 32 hours. Furthermore, one-day workshops have minimal impact.
- . Size - an optimal range for the number of participants is between 8 (minimum) and 20 (maximum).

- . Representation - single school workshops (64% of responses) tend to be related to positive impact, and multi-school workshops (36% of responses) were negatively related to impact.
- . School level - elementary school teachers/administrators are more likely to rate their experiences as having higher impact than non-elementary teachers/administrators.

--Workshops and long-term use: the structure of the inservice workshop experience and the characteristics of the consultant/presenter have significant impact on what participants acquire and use. This is also associated to what they continue to use over a long period of time (6 months or more). Particular successful are:

- . Workshops which require teachers to try out and report on their experiences with new skills, information, etc.
- . Workshops which provide teachers with in-class technical assistance.
- . Workshops which supply teachers with resources--information and activities that are easily adaptable to the classroom setting.
- . Workshops which require teachers to develop projects, activities or curricula for their classes.

About Administrators: School and district administrators play an important role in developing, promoting and supporting staff in-service programs. The extent and quality of administrators involvement in inservice has a significant influence on the projects and their impact.

--Administrative characteristics associated with effective inservice are:

- . Assertive and supportive educational leadership.
- . Promoting an atmosphere of:
 - . High standards for professional development.
 - . Strong learning orientation (for students and teachers).
 - . Clear educational objectives.
 - . Innovation and effective problem-solving.
- . Providing incentives for teachers to participate in and initiate inservice programs.
- . Recognizing teachers who initiate and/or undertake the development of successful inservice projects.
- . Taking an interest in, and when appropriate, participating in on-going inservice projects and activities.
- . Supporting and encouraging staff in the use and adaptation of new skills, techniques and behaviors required through inservice training.

Administrators' expectations are also associated with long-term effects of staff inservice projects.

About Schools and Communities: The school and the community constitute an important environment for effective inservice training. The TDR study has found that:

- . Elementary schools are more supportive environments for staff development than are secondary schools.
- . The schools' tradition and practices of inservice training are strongly related to effective and less effective inservice programs.
- . Changes at the school level--in either student population, staff composition, or administration, can often inhibit the development and impact of effective staff inservice.

- . School systems differ significantly in their ability to promote and develop effective inservice training.
- . Community attitudes toward education influence teacher attitudes toward inservice training.

In general, professional attitudes at the school-building level, district policies and practices, and community support and expectations are associated with the quality and effect of staff inservice programs.

In summary, the findings indicates that many factors influence the development of effective staff inservice training. Particularly important among these are:

- . The quality of the workshop itself;
- . The quality and extent of administrative involvement; and
- . The school and community as a context for professional development.